Deconstructing a Colonial Legacy: An Analysis of Indian Secondary Education Policy

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Abstract: The Indian secondary education system has, since independence in 1947, strived to transform in terms of policy but failed to transcend in practice the challenges presented by the colonial legacy it inherited. This study draws on Hodgson and Spours (2006) analytical policy framework to critically examine three key Indian secondary education policy initiatives: the Mudaliar Commission Report (1952-1953); the Kothari Commission Report (1964-1966); and the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017). The objectives of this study are to develop an insight into how three policy constructions of knowledge and intervention endeavour to: 1) impact access, governance, pedagogical approaches, curriculum reform and; 2) deepen an understanding of how this interplays with the challenges of inclusivity, equality, quality, equity, achievement and progression in Indian secondary education provision.

Keywords: equity, policy, secondary education, India

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Introduction

Global education policy highlights that inclusivity, equality, quality, equity, achievement and progression need to be at the heart of secondary education provision (Mukhpadhyay 2001; Planning Commission, Government of India, 2013). India, like many other countries, continues to struggle to achieve this in practice (Biswal, 2011). According to Nair (1979) the Indi-an education system has historically strived to transform policy yet failed to transcend in practice the colonial legacy it inherited in 1947. The colonial vision of secondary education sought to develop the British higher education progression of affluent Indian upper caste male students. The sole goal of this vision was to enhance the accessibility of productive employees for the British colonial administration in India (Viswanathan, 1990).

With the aim of deconstructing the colonial legacy, which continues to challenge Indian secondary education provision, I concentrate on three key policy initiatives: the Mudaliar Commission Report (1952-1953); the Kothari Commission Report (1964-1966); and the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017). I explore an insight into how perceptions of knowledge and intervention may impact access, governance, pedagogical approaches, and curriculum reform. This may deepen an understanding of some of the challenges of inclusivity, equality, quality, equity, achievement and progression in Indian secondary education.

I situate this exploration in an outline of underpinning theoretical concepts. I then position myself in terms of methodology. Following this, I provide an analysis of the three policy initiatives covering the time period from India's independence to the current context for Indian government secondary schools.

Underpinning theoretical concepts

India covers diverse socio-economic, cultural, caste and religious groups across vast linguistic and geographical variations. Social stratification marks inequalities in access, achievement and progression in education (Dhawan, 2005). This is also demonstrated in a gross secondary education enrolment ratio of 47% (World Bank, 2009) and an estimated gross higher education enrolment ratio of 20.4% for students between 18-23 years of age (Government of India, 2013: ii).

The secondary education enrolment rate and progression to higher education is considerably less than the national average for women, people with special educational needs and disability, marginalised socio-economic and caste based groups, religious minorities and for those who live in rural areas (Thorat & Kumar, 2008). This is highlighted in the current Twelfth Five-Year Plan (Planning Commission, Government of India 2013, p. 48) which states that: "The sharp drop-off in enrolment at the middle school level and the increasing enrolment gap from elementary to higher secondary suggests that the gains at the elementary level have not yet impacted the school sector as a whole. Dropout rates in secondary and higher education continue to be high, especially for socially excluded and economically marginalised groups of learners.".

Located within this context, the below outlined conceptual tools are rooted in postcolonial principles for critically analysing Indian secondary education policy, in terms of its transformative potential with regards to inclusive education practice, social exclusion and provision of quality in education.

Postcolonial principles for inclusive education practice

As Sayed (2002, pp. 53-54) rightly points out the discourse of inclusion in pol-icy must also inform principles for inclusive practice that can be made possible through access, governance, pedagogy, curriculum and a culture of inclusion. Van der Westhuizen (2013) succinctly argues that postcolonial perspectives contribute to transformation in structures of under-standing policy and research for inclusive education practice. Van der Westhuizen (2013) maintains that postcolonial insights contribute to social change through shaping intellectual and attitudinal tools that may provide a framework for redressing inequities and inequalities intensifying social injustices. Similarly, Shimpi and Nicholson (2014, p. 727) assert that: "Choosing a discourse to signify the production of knowledge and truths is inherently a moral and political act. Each type of dis-course, through its language and assumptions, makes particular understandings salient while leaving others undetected and unexamined, thus reifying certain assumptions and power relationships over others. Post-colonial theory is instructive for critically inviting a revision of inequitable historical accounts to reclaim the

stories, voices and experiences of those who have been traditionally silenced".

A postcolonial conceptual lens may create space for transforming one's epistemological invisibility, within hegemonic practices, through a commitment to, in Spivak's words, "the ethical stance of making discursive room for the Other to exist" (Spivak, 1988, p. 6). Empowerment, leading to the possibility of social justice, ''is not realised in terms of subject positions determined by the other rather it is a posture of autonomy adopted in the desire to create new spaces to self identify and self represent within the hegemony of structural and systemic realities'' (Spivak, 1996, p. 289). These principles frame conceptualisation of social exclusion and quality in education. Postcolonial principles for inclusive education practice: 1) validates and legitimises the voice and visibility of marginalised groups of people through democratic and participatory processes and; 2) acknowledges different individual's agency as embedded in and evolving through forms of collective action, that activate differences, in order to transform historically situated discursive practices of inequality (Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006, Tikly, 2010).

Social exclusion

According to Sayed (2002, p. 12) social exclusion is a complex and layered process "whereby social, economic and political struggle is waged to re-produce or challenge dominant relations of power research should focus on the processes and indeed the rules through which deprivation occurs [and this] returns us to the concern that the discourses of inclusion and exclusion often obscure or mask the agendas of cooperation and control.". A homogenized approach to equality without addressing issues of equity has been one of the major limitations of initiatives to redress social exclusion (de Haan, 2000). As Sayed explains (2002, p. 12): "One size does not fit all because citizens do not arise from positions of social, economic and political equality. This approach also tends to lump inequalities together so that problems are dealt with in the same way".

Deepening such an understanding of social exclusion, de Haan (2000, p. 2) claims that social exclusion "goes beyond the analysis of resource allocation mechanisms and includes power relations, agency, culture and social identity".

Quality

An analysis of Indian secondary education policy examines whether, in such a diverse country, policy provides a context specific approach to address challenges of social exclusion and existing inequalities. The analysis undertaken in this study is aligned with Tikly and Barett's (2011) and Nikel and Lowe's (2010) social justice approach as a conceptual tool for understanding quality in education. Tikly and Barett (2011) emphasise that good quality education recognises the voice, visibility and agency of all participants, especially marginalised groups. Quality in education, through participatory and democratic processes, should embody effectiveness, efficiency, equity, relevance and sustainability, informed by con-text specific transformative strategies, addressing complex and multidimensional forms of universal inequalities (Kabeer, 2000). Tikly and Barett (2011) highlight the importance of education provision that supports an equal and equitable distribution of resources in order to enable every individual's capability to function- to be and to become, in ways that are valued in society. Nikel and Lowe (2010) have further enhanced this conceptual understanding by stressing the importance of responsiveness and reflexivity as constructs to be engaged with in the planning and implementation of education processes. In such terms, Indian secondary education should provide equal and equitable opportunities for participants to build social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993).

Methodology

This research study draws on an analytical policy framework developed by Hodgson and Spours (2006), which builds on the work of Bowe et al. (1992 cited in Hodgson & Spours 2006). Hodgson and Spours (2006, p. 684) suggest a four-dimensional analytical policy framework that considers "political era, the education state, the policy process and political space".

Secondary education access for all and reform, through policy developments, has been an ongoing process in India for more than 65 years. In 1952, the Mudaliar Commission was the first policy initiative after independence in 1947. During 1966, the Kothari Commission Report was a second policy venture to introduce major reforms to secondary education. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) for secondary education informs current secondary education practice in Indian government secondary

schools. Hodgson and Spours (2006) framework provides a conceptual lens for developing an understanding of the historical, political and state context for each of the three considered policy initiatives in order to examine challenges of social exclusion and provision of quality rooted in postcolonial principles for inclusive education practice.

An analysis of policy: historical, political and state context and content

The Mudaliar Commission Report (1952-1953)

The year 1952 was marked by the first general election in India. The Indian National Congress (a leading political party involved in the struggle for Indian independence), under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, came into power. It was a significant period for initiating radical social change to transform the legacy of colonialism and hierarchical social stratification (re)producing injustices, inequalities and inequities in secondary education and the wider social context.

As pointed out earlier, Mookerjee (1944) explains that Indian secondary education under British colonial rule promoted education practice, pedagogy, language and curriculum that was divorced from the socio-cultural and educational realities of diverse Indian people. The main priority was to develop civil administrators who would facilitate the implementation of governance informed by colonial values. The colonial administration maintained a rigid control over decisions regarding significant areas for the education system such as access, governance, pedagogical approaches, language choice, teacher education and curriculum (Kumar, 1988).

Intensifying inequity and inequalities, social stratification also led to the exploitation and oppression of marginalised groups of people including women (Prosad Sil, 1997). Social stratification in India, during colonialism, was dominated by the Indian caste system. Placed at the top of the hierarchical caste system were the Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors). Next in the caste hierarchy were the caste groups Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (labourers). Nomads, indigenous tribes, and Dalits (historically marginalised and disadvantaged groups of people) were treated as 'outcastes' with less status, privileges and formidable barriers to education access (Betielle, 1996). Caste stratification maintained non-assimilation and socio-cultural barriers between and within different religious groups (Srinivas, 1998). Post 1947 the expansion of secondary education was

embraced to enable access to education for all. However, this approach was not without limitations as Nair (1979, p. 180) states: "the country adopted a policy of expansion of all secondary education in the post-independence period 40,000 secondary schools (against about 5000 in 1947) with an enrolment of about 12 million against about 900,000 in 1947. This had several undesirable consequences on the quality of secondary and higher education and also on the numbers of educated unemployed."

The newly elected government, had to deal with the tensions that emerged between the drive for expansion and the need for good quality secondary education provision. The Education Minister Maulana Azad highlighted that there was a vital requirement for secondary education re-form as it presented one of the biggest challenges in terms of quality and responsiveness to the socio-economic requirements of the country (Aggarwal, 1993).

The Secondary Education Commission, established in 1952, highlighted six areas that required urgent reform in secondary education. The first area of concern was the widespread implementation of a rigid content-based curriculum divorced from the realities and lived experiences of learners. The second concern was the lack of a holistic development approach within the education process. The third issue was the exclusion created by education delivery in English. The fourth concern was the failure of pedagogical approaches to engage with the development of independent learning and critical thinking. The fifth concern was presented as large class sizes with a detrimental impact on teacher-learner ratios. The final concern related to the practice of exam driven teaching-which promoted rote and mechanical learning at the expense of self-discovery and enquiry based education (Mahanta, 1999).

The policy development process was informed by quantitative research with education institutions and practitioners and observation notes from tours undertaken by Commission members in different parts of the country (Aggarwal, 1993). The Commission offered five core aims for the purpose of secondary education in India. These five aims concentrated on: 1) developing learners into accountable and responsible democratic citizens; 2) reforming the curriculum with, for instance, the inclusion of vocational education practice (learners were to be streamed to progress into academic higher education or technical vocational development through a selective summative assessment process); 3) developing leadership and independent critical thinking in learners; 4) building a holistic approach to learner

development and; 5) delivering education in regional languages (Chaube, 1988).

The Mudaliar Commission attempted to recognise and forefront some areas for constructively restructuring secondary education. For instance, secondary education was extended to 17 years of age and specific improvements, in lieu with the five mentioned aims, were suggested for school infrastructure, resources, pedagogical approaches, curriculum, language choice and examination reform (Kabir, 1955).

The Kothari Commission Report (1964 -1966)

The socio-political context was marked by territorial disputes (Sino-Indian 1962 war), violence on the basis of religious differences, caste oppression, class inequalities and regional separatist insurgencies. The primary focus of the Indian National Congress, under the continued leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was to strengthen national socio-economic cohesion and promote national development (Aggarwal, 1993).

A decade later, the Kothari Commission (1964-66), under the leadership of Dr. Kothari (Chairman of the University Grants Commission) aimed to introduce secondary education reforms that would be responsive to nation-al priorities for socio-economic development and cohesion (Mahanta, 1999). As Madhusudhan (2009, p. 12) states, " a reading of the Kothari Commission Report (1964-66) shows the influence of the human capital theory – the report argues that education will result in increased economic productivity and contribute to national development.".

In order to develop guidelines for best practice the Commission included a member each from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Russia, France and Japan. Unlike the Mudaliar Commission, the Kothari Commission established seven problem-solving working groups. These working groups employed a mixed method research approach, over a period of approximately two years, to inform recommendations for secondary education reform. The mixed method approach consisted of questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and consultation with 9,000 research participants who were educators, scientists, industrialists, academics, teachers, administrators and students from different regions in the country. In addition to this, over a period of three months, observations were completed in a variety of schools, colleges and universities (Madhusudhan, 2009).

The five broad areas for secondary education reform that emerged in the Kothari Commission Report consisted of: 1) building a stronger relation-ship between secondary education provision and national needs and requirements for socio-economic progress and development; 2) improving educational quality in order to become internationally competitive; 3) developing equal access to secondary education opportunities in order to build a more educated workforce in the country; 4) promoting social and national cohesion and integration and; 5) the removal of a streaming process in the secondary education system and the extension of secondary education till 18 years of age. The Kothari Commission also argued for the need of a more proactive role of state and central government in the monitoring and implementation of secondary education reforms (Bagulia, 2004). Nonetheless, as Biswal (2011, p. 17) comments, "[it] is, however, interesting to note that, unlike elementary and higher education, the respective responsibilities of the Centre and States are not clearly defined for secondary education. This has seriously constrained the development of secondary education in the country".

The Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017)
Further extending the Kothari Commission recommendations, the Nation-al Policy on Education (NPE), in 1986 and then again in 1992, integrated egalitarian access to secondary education with an enhanced focus on vocational curriculum provision. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and vocational education linked to national development priori-ties shaped curriculum reform. Prominence was given to gender and caste based equity and equality in access to education opportunities. Policy implementation promoted decentralisation of governance to strengthen state-level control and developing the autonomy of Boards of Secondary Education to facilitate quality driven changes (Dhawan, 2005).

Policy initiatives in education predominantly concentrated on primary education from 2002 to 2007. The Working Group on Secondary Education for the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) and the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committee on the universalisation of secondary education, in 2005, made recommendations for increasing resource investment. The redistribution of resources was undertaken in order to facilitate the planning and implementation of reforms in secondary education for the enhanced provision of access, quality and the integration of ICT and vocational education in the curriculum (Pathak, 2007). Building on the Kothari Commission initiative, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012)

attempted to develop international standards for secondary education responsive to labour market requirements. Critiquing this endeavour, Biswal (2011, p. 2) maintains that "one of the major challenges for education is to discover new ways of 'knowing' so as to make nations effectively participate in the globalisation process, while ensuring equitable economic and socio-cultural diversity".

Disparities in the achievement of equitable equality across diversity continue to prevail in the Indian secondary education system across and with-in different regions in the county (Kingdon, 2007). Highlighting some of the challenges for gender equality in secondary education, Pande (1993, p. 164) explains that: "Schools for girls are few and far between in the rural areas of Kumaon. High schools are beyond 5 kilometres in 97 percent villages". These distances are formidable barriers in the pursuit of girl's education. There is no systematic governance of the schools. Remoteness and fragmented habitations involve exorbitant administrative costs while the schools lack even the basic facilities like blackboards. Girls' education is given lesser importance as far as the priorities of the parents are concerned girls are compelled to drop out from schools at initial stages".

Succinctly capturing the current context of Indian secondary education provision Kingdon (2007, p. 6) shares that: "in 2002, there were only one-fifth as many secondary schools as the number of primary schools. Thus, it seems likely that secondary school enrolment rates are low partly because of the lack of supply of nearby secondary schools. However, despite supply constraints, demand for secondary education has risen and is likely to rise (partly via increase in private schooling) because it is a lucrative level of education to acquire.".

Since independence, over a period of seventy years, Indian secondary education has been marked by a series of policy initiatives and suggested re-forms. The current Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) continues the struggle to deconstruct a colonial legacy of social exclusion in order to enhance quality and inclusivity in secondary education throughout the country. For example, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) presents the aims of: "universalisation of secondary education by 2017 raising the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education to 20 percent by 2017 focus on quality of education faculty development and teachers' training significant reduction in social, gender and regional gaps in education" (Planning Commission Government of India, 2013, pp. 18-27). Yet the practice of

prejudiced indifference towards marginalised students re-mains a persistent reality within Indian educational institutions (Krishnan, 2016).

Social exclusion, quality and inclusive education practice rooted in post-colonial principles

The persistence of challenges outlined in the Mudaliar and Kothari Com-mission reports and disparities outlined in the current Twelfth Five-Year Plan suggest that social exclusion exists and quality and inclusive education embedded in postcolonial principles remain elusive in practice. Today, injustices, inequalities and inequitable socio-economic conditions continue to shape the experiences of marginalised learners within and outside the context of Indian secondary education provision (Sayed, 2002; Madhusudhan, 2009).

For example, caste and patriarchy, as systems of stratification, have many dimensions that influence ways in which secondary education provision for marginalised learners become implemented at micro level. Taking ac-count of the diversity and hierarchies that exist at micro level may open the possibility for reflection on the mechanisms through which micro lev-el participation in and ownership of secondary education processes are facilitated (Kabeer, 2000).

Applying Hodgson and Spours (2006) framework to contextualise an analysis of policy, in this study, traces ways in which three secondary education policy initiatives may/may not (re)define the relationship be-tween marginalised learner identities and egalitarian discursive practices with the potential to change learners' lived realties and education experiences. Millions of learners impacted on by policy events, analysed in this study, belong to diverse marginalised groups. In a range of ways, the marginalised group a learner belongs to influences his/her status and where s/he is situated. This may also influence the control learners have over mechanisms for accessing resources and opportunities.

The three analysed policy initiatives take account of socio-cultural and economic inequalities created through divisions by introducing systemic changes in the structures through which secondary education schools operate. Some examples involve decentralisation of school administration, budget planning, infrastructure resourcing and implementation. In rural areas, village level organisations such as the panchayat (village level

democratic organisation) or mahila mandal (women's grassroots organisation) are often treated as entry points for decentralized secondary education provision.

Affirmative action such as positive discrimination, in government legislation, aims to increase marginalised learners' participation in secondary schools and wider society. Such action has been a conscious effort in opening routes for accessing information, resources and opportunities.

As outlined in an analysis of three policy initiatives, spanning over more than 65 years, introducing policy strategies for providing access to opportunities may work positively in reducing isolation and dependency on those who maintain privileged control over information and resources. Yet, paradoxically, in doing so it may also perpetuate dependency and isolation if the visibility, voice and agency of marginalised learners is not rep-resented and recognised within decision- making processes (Spivak, 1988, 1996).

Deciding what constitutes capacity building for learners in secondary education depends on the image of needs internalised within secondary education provision and processes. Images that are created through a history of discursive practices infiltrate any mechanisms for change with structural continuities (Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006, Tikly, 2010). For example, Indian government focus on positive discrimination for marginalised learners in secondary education is both a consequence and a continuation of changes in a history of discursive practices. As described in this study, being inclusive of marginalised learners, at policy level, does not necessarily take account of the diversity and the exclusion that exists for marginalised learners at a range of levels. As Srinivas (1998, pp. 35-37) states: "Inclusion and exclusion operated (and continue to operate) at all levels and the exclusion…from certain important activities, areas, and facilities cannot therefore be interpreted as evidence of their not being a part of the Community, it ought not to be difficult to conceive of communities, which are non-egalitarian, their people playing interdependent roles and all of them having a common interest in survival. The argument that only "egalitarian" societies can have local communities has to be proved. Nor can an implicit assumption that "egalitarian" communities do not have significant differences in property, income, and status be accepted as a "socio-logical reality."

The consultation process of the Mudaliar Commission report was not inclusive of the democratic participation of learners and marginalised groups of people. Recognition and representation of marginalised groups was also

not evident in the Kothari Commission working groups and consultation processes. The current Prime Minister Narendra Modi has placed an emphasis on more a centralised government national agenda marking the end of the Planning Commission and the Twelfth Five-Year Plan initiatives in 2017 (Sharma & Sikarwar, 2016). A democratic process of participation and, as mentioned before, the representation and recognition of the voice, visibility and agency of all participants, especially marginalised groups of learners, in the education system may have contributed to the development of enhanced quality and equitable provision in education, as defined by Tikly and Barett (2011) and Nikel and Lowe (2010).

Regarding the limitations of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, within the current context of secondary education practice, Biswal (2011, p. 28) states that: "India needs to step up investment in pre-reform activities for creating a sustainable environment for initiating change; improving political will; introducing strategic management models ensuring continuity in change at the school level; and increasing budgetary allocation to make more inclusive quality secondary education a reality"

Finally, considering principles of postcolonial inclusive education practice, the Mudaliar and Kothari Commission reports failed to move beyond the rhetoric of rights, ethics and efficacy discourses in order to develop and guide affirmative action, not transformative practice. Postcolonial principles of inclusivity that address challenges in access, governance, pedagogy, and creating a culture of inclusion still remain substantially un-addressed (see Sayed 2002, 2011). Showcasing the current context for secondary education, Biswal (2011, p. 1) argues that: "there is a large deficit in policy planning for secondary education development, which not only goes against the principle of inclusive development and the service-led growth strategy but also affects India's capacity to connect effectively to globalisation. The broad development approach pursued by the country needs a clearer framework for change with more focus on decentralisation and governance issues and quality improvement."

Through the theoretical and methodological conceptual tools offered in this study it could be argued that enhanced access to democratic and inclusive spaces for the participation of diverse teachers and learners, especially those belonging to marginalized groups, at all levels of decision-making processes, may contribute to developing transformative strategies for existing barriers to equitable, inclusive and good quality secondary education for all.

Conclusion

A consideration of three policy events, drawing on Hodgson and Spours (2006) critically examines policy context and content located in a framework of analysis that draws out the historical, political and state context as influences on and by policy developments.

Through contextualising policy issues of inclusivity, equality, quality, equity, achievement and progression are explored within the broad themes of social exclusion, quality and inclusive education embedded in postcolonial principles for secondary education practice. An analysis of the three Indian secondary education policy initiatives suggests that the introduction of participatory collaborative action-research methodologies inclusive of the voice, visibility and agency of marginalised groups of people- especially learners, may make a contribution in these areas. This may facilitate the development of context specific intervention strategies that are rooted in democratic leadership processes and practices that aspire to transform, empower and enable equity and equality in the provision of good quality secondary education.

As this study shows, the democratic participation of all, especially marginalised groups of people, in decision-making processes and practices is a crucial component of equitable secondary education, especially in socio-economic and cultural contexts where disparities in education equity, equality and quality remain evident (Biswal, 2011).

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